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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, NEA/PI

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: NEA/PI DIRECTOR ROMANOWSKI DISCUSSES BMENA WITH
MFA, FINANCE MINISTRY

REF: MANAMA 300

Classified by DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) NEA/PI Office Director Alina Romanowski discussed the Broader Middle East/North Africa (BMENA) initiative with MFA Assistant Undersecretary for Coordination and Follow-up Shaikh Abdul Aziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa and Ministry of Finance Director for Economic Planning Yousef Humood during a March 8-9 visit to Bahrain. She also met with Minister of State for Foreign Affairs/Minister of Information Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar about reorganizing Bahrain TV (septel). In her meeting with Shaikh Abdul Aziz and MFA Director of Bilateral Relations Dhafer Al Uman, she raised GOB preparations for this year's Forum for the Future conference, to be held in Bahrain. Shaikh Abdul Aziz said that the timing was still not fixed, but that the GOB would coordinate with the Europeans to ensure that the Forum does not conflict with the Euro-Med Barcelona anniversary event on November 27-28. He mentioned November 11-12 as potential dates for the Forum.

12. (C) Shaikh Abdul Aziz added that if Bahrain is to succeed with its reform process, it must have the backing of the G8. Noting that neighboring Saudi Arabia and Kuwait do not even allow women to vote, he hoped G8 countries would "make what we're doing work" by publicly recognizing Bahrain's reform moves at the Forum. Shaikh Abdul Aziz and Al Uman both mentioned that at this year's Forum, NGOs should play a much more prominent role than they did at the Morocco meeting.

13. (C) On the Bahrain Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence (BCEE), Shaikh Abdul Aziz stressed that getting broad G8 support is a top priority for the GOB. He noted that he would meet shortly with representatives of the Japanese government and would ask them to consider supporting the BCEE. In a separate meeting, the Ministry of Finance's Yousef Humood told Romanowski that he had also been in touch with the Japanese, British, and French about the BCEE. They gave initial indications of support for the center but requested a concrete plan that they could consider. He explained that this was the reason for his insisting that the Beyster Institute, MEPI contractors for the BCEE, create a business plan by June (reftel). The plan would be used to solicit G8 and regional support for the center. Romanowski cautioned Humood from pressing hard for funding to construct a building to house the center. The BCEE should not be viewed as an infrastructure project. Humood responded that the GOB wants the center to be a showcase for the BMENA initiative in the region, and a building will be necessary down the road.

14. (C) Humood said that in addition to training, he would want the BCEE to provide follow-up services for graduates. These would include providing the trainees with links to development funding facilities to finance their projects, management advice, and general guidance and mentoring. Such an array of services would greatly increase the percentage of successful graduates. In response to Romanowski's question, Humood admitted that the GOB had not yet discussed these ideas with Beyster.

15. (C) When asked to compare development of the two Entrepreneurship Centers in Bahrain and Morocco, Humood said that Morocco has much more experience working on entrepreneurship and business development than Bahrain does, perhaps because of Morocco's proximity to and dealings with Europe. Morocco has the "full picture" on entrepreneurship training. On the other hand, Bahrain has access to more sources of funding, from the Gulf region, than Morocco, and he wants to build up this strength.

16. (U) Ms. Romanowski cleared this cable.

MONROE